

On Being Invisible II
(Hypatia Speaks to Jefferson in a Dream)

David Rosenboom

Narrator's Part

Part I

[Introduction]

[After the first, drone-like sound texture has become established.]

. . . In the beginning

. . . there is reason.

. . . Beginnings begin with reasoned mind.

. . . We continue, thinking of two-ness,

. . . like the polar qualities of a global consciousness

. . . becoming aware of its own existence for the first time.

. . . The cells agreed long ago to become the beast, and now, the beasts have joined in the next level of conscious agreement.

. . . The new awareness wonders about its endurance,

. . . having survived the rundown of its planetary mother heart.

. . . It is like space itself, charged with the activity of thought.

. . . Still in memory, live the players of past dramas.

. . . Now appearing in the male form, Thomas Jefferson, to whom we will refer as, "TJ".

. . . We tap his brain with our brain's robot double, an intelligent automaton, to relive that moment when, as he tries to write something, maybe one of his later-to-be-famous documents, he dozes and hears a dialog among the multiple entities in his own mind.

. . . Wedged in-between the end of the Age of Enlightenment and emerging Romanticism, TJ was an American hero who espoused freedom of thought and religion but also kept slaves, a revolutionary torn between rationality and romance, whose relationships with women symbolized the psycho-sexual dilemma of a young nation, whose brilliant inventiveness and creative genius was at once steeped in Neo-Classicism and also evinced a great contempt for Plato, who was both a champion of the political avant garde and a player in the new dynamics of wealth and power, a president in the new world who was also obsessed with the mathematics of miscegenation.

. . . Now appearing in the female form,

. . . we hear from TJ's brain, trying to balance the polarities produced by its preoccupation with inconsistencies.

. . . His simultaneous quandary and reverie is interrupted by messages from across the globe, bridging the centuries, from someone who also stood at the crossroads of time, the female form of the dreaming awareness, Hypatia of Alexandria.

. . . Murdered in Alexandria in A.D. 415 for being both Greek and a woman who dared lecture, Hypatia resided at a focal point of change in the old world, the end of Classical Greek philosophy and the beginning of the Dark Ages, the foundation of Neo-Platonism and the emergence of Plotinus, the transformation of Christianity from a moral teaching into a brutal instrument of political power, the appropriation of Plotinus by the Christians to mystify and obscure thinking so as to achieve totalitarian control, the decline of Alexandria as an intellectual center symbolized by destruction of the fabled library, all combined with an unprecedented outpouring of romantic, multi-sexual poetry and labyrinthine racial-political conflicts among Greeks, Jews, Ptolmaics, vestiges of old Egypt, Copts, Islamics, Europeans, and many others,

. . . just a small sampling don't you know.

. . . Catastasis wrote about these times.

. . . "The time of assault, that fated time, draws near, that time which, they say, the winged messenger threatened, the leader of the enemy host"

. . . is upon us.

. . . These people thought they saw the end of the world coming, the end of evolved culture, the world being overtaken by those less evolved than themselves,

. . . a common feeling in the cycles of time.

. . . In 415, Hypatia was also having premonitions of her demise,

. . . she saw it coming, brought about by lower beings at the end of a great period.

. . . Palladas, who lived in Alexandria during the fifth century, wrote in Greek verse a cry of awe and wonder:

When I see thee, I worship thee, thee and thy words.
Beholding the starry dwelling of the Maiden;
For all thy life by thee is passed with God Himself!
O holy Hypatia, O words of beauty's grace,
Thou, the pure star of wise and true philosophy!

. . . We begin, then, to get us in the right mood, with a drone, controlled by the coherent waves of our players brains.

Part 2

[When the drone-like section has passed and the first, more pointillistic sounds, triggered by brain evoked responses begin.]

. . . We proceed with further evolution now, using the waves of singular events from TJ's and Hypatia's brains, to create a sense of the complexities of time.

[The following phrases to be inserted at will according to the progress of the improvisation.]

. . . TJ . . . was revolted

. . . by the idea of slavery and the casual slaughter of Indians.

. . . His plan . . . asking for the right to emancipate his slaves

. . . had the overtones of Robinson Crusoe and Noah's Ark.

. . . He sought . . . education plus colonization, at public cost.

. . . It became a bone-deep feeling.

. . . Even . . . the ideas in our famous Declaration,

. . . traced to men of the Enlightenment,

. . . first came to his lips publicly in the legal defense of a black man.

. . . Virginians, . . . who every day exercised the power of life and death over blacks,

. . . who forbade slave gatherings save for worship,

. . . and who silenced dissent with whips and dogs,

. . . now began to chant of enslavement, themselves.

. . . Enslavement . . . became a widespread shibboleth and rallying cry.

. . . In 1774, TJ indicted the Britons — the oppressors — of a deliberate and systematic plan to reduce us to slavery.

. . . There were some who saw the hypocrisy

. . . and they found a solution in the simple, psychological device of projection. It is the British who are the enslavers?!

. . . Thus, emerged a national dilemma and contradiction

. . . and, for TJ, a profoundly personal dilemma.

. . . he worked through the complexities of the problem intellectually.

. . . The emotional complexities, he would never resolve.

. . To insinuate and inculcate softly was TJ's way. But against the ever accelerating evil of slavery, pleading and insinuation were beginning to look like political imbecility.

. . . TJ had been responsible for miscegenation.

. . . His octoroon children had been subjected by Virginia society to the same degradation as the blackest Africa, and he had been pilloried for siring them.

. . . nevertheless . . . Sally arrived in Paris to share his double life in Europe.

. . . The mathematics of miscegenation continued to preoccupy him.

. . . "Let the third crossing be of q and C , their offspring will be $q/2 + C/2 = a/8 + A/8 + B/4 + C/2$, call this e (eighth, who having less than $1/4$ of a , or of pure Negro blood, to wit $1/8$ only, is no longer a mulatto, so that a third cross clears the blood."

. . . He tried, unsuccessfully, to push through the abolition of slavery.

. . . He could not silence the false reasoning of the opposing voices.

. . . On the day of the crucial vote, a legislature was sick. John Beatty from New Jersey didn't show and the measure lost, 7 to 6.

. . . To refute was easy, but to silence impossible . . .

. . . TJ also failed, as everyone regrets, to carry out reform in weights and measures, and two hundred years later, we still pay heavily for the absurdities of the British system. The legislatures did agree, though, to a national coinage system with decimals.

Part 3

[Speech about American Indians to be inserted at an appropriate place.]

. . . TJ merely mumbled his inaugural addresses, nearly inaudibly. He spoke of Washington and Franklin who,

. . . never spoke over ten minutes, and then laid their shoulders to the great points, knowing that the little ones would follow of themselves.

. . . The murder of Hypatia reminds us of the eloquence in our native peoples' words when, in their defense, they must rally attention to their plight.

. . . TJ knew the great Ontasseté, warrior and masterful orator of the Cherokees. Ontasseté seemed to address himself to the moon in his prayers,

. . . his resounding voice, distinct articulation, animated action, and the solemn silence of his people at their several fires, inspired awe and veneration,

. . . altho' TJ didn't understand a word he uttered.

. . . The chief, Logan, long known as a friend of the white man, made a similarly eloquent speech in his own defense, as reported in the Virginia press in 1775, when he turned to revenge after the senseless murder of his entire family and many of his tribe.

. . . "I appeal to any white man to say, if ever he entered Logan's cabin hungry, and he gave him not meat: if ever he came cold and naked, and he clothed him not. during the course of the last long and bloody war Logan remained idle in his cabin, an advocate for peace. Such was my love for the whites, that my countrymen pointed as they passed, and said, "Logan is the friend of white men." I had even thought to have lived with you, but for the injuries of one man, Colonel Cresap, the last spring, in cold blood, and unprovoked, murdered all the relations of Logan, not even sparing my women and children. there runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature. This called on me for revenge. I have sought it: I have killed many: I have fully glutted my vengeance: for my country I rejoice at the beams of peace. but do not harbor a thought that mine is the joy of fear. Logan never felt fear. He will not turn on his heel to save his life. Who is there to mourn for Logan? — Not one."

. . . Logan was a man of peace and conciliation, taunted for cowardice, but goaded by senseless slaughter into becoming a fierce warrior.

Part 4

[First person . . . as in a dream . . . to be used near the end.]

. . . Emerging from the deepest part of the dream, . . . we turn now to more philosophical musings . . . with a sense of reminiscing.

. . . I . . . have reposed my head on that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent Creator has made so soft for us, knowing how much we should be forced to use it.

. . . As the Ancients tolerated visionaries and enthusiasts of all kinds, so they permitted a free scope to philosophy as a balance. Thus, matters were balanced; reason had play and science flourished.

. . . These contrarieties produced harmony.

. . . Socrates was . . . too wise to believe and too honest to pretend . . . that he had converse with supreme beings.

. . . Of the ancient philosophers, of whose ethics we have sufficient information to make an estimate . . . I name not, Plato, . . . who only used the name of Socrates to cover the whimsies of his own brain.

. . . The superlative wisdom of Socrates is testified by all antiquity, and placed on ground not to be questioned. When, therefore, Plato puts into his mouth such paralogisms, such quibbles on words, and sophisms as a schoolboy would be ashamed of, we conclude they were the whimsies of Plato's own foggy brain, and acquit Socrates of puerilities so unlike his character.

. . . Believing that faith is everything

. . . — and the more incomprehensible the proposition, the more merit in its faith
—

. . . the inquisition of public opinion

. . . overwhelms in practice,

. . . the freedom asserted

. . . by the laws in theory.